
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MARKAN ἀφῆμι-*chreia* AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS

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Abstract

The theme of Jesus and the forgiveness of sin has always been a contentious one within historical Jesus research. This article gives a brief overview of the debate on the authenticity of various forgiveness logia in the Jesus tradition, as well as the different criteria that have been used in the past in an attempt to validate them. It focuses on two specific forgiveness logia in the Markan tradition (2:1-12, 3:20-35) in order to assess whether the manner in which they have been crafted as chreia can provide insight into how the ἀφῆμι logia of Jesus have been preserved in the pre-Markan tradition.

Key Words: Mark; Memory Studies; Forgiveness; Historical Jesus; *Chreia*

Introduction

The focus of this article is on selected ἀφῆμι *chreia* in the Gospel of Mark and their relationship to the historical Jesus.¹ Its focus is not on the concept of forgiveness as it is communicated by the words, deeds and even attitude of Jesus in Mark. Nor is it on the manner in which Jesus effected forgiveness by specific actions (i.e. healings and his death).² Neither does the article investigate the link between the selected Markan ἀφῆμι *chreia* and the historical Jesus in order to reconstruct the theology of the historical Jesus. Its specific intention is rather to evaluate the possibility of determining the transmission history of the Markan ἀφῆμι *chreia* by focusing on its literary form.

The bedrock of historical Jesus research is, according to Meier (2011:307-308), the attempt to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic elements in the extant sources; in other words, to differentiate what comes from the ministry of Jesus (28-30 CE) from what was created by the oral tradition (30-70 CE) or produced by the redactional work of the evangelist (70-100 CE). This differentiation process can be conducted methodologically from two points of departure (Hägerland 2012:17-18). The first, taken by scholars such as NT Wright (1996)³ and Dale Allison⁴ (2010), is to postulate a plausible general picture of

¹ For Meier (2011:291, 296) the historical Jesus is a modern abstraction and construct that can be 'recovered' and examined by using the scientific tools of modern research. It is, therefore, important to distinguish the historical Jesus from the 'real Jesus' – the totality of everything Jesus ever said or did, which is impossible to do.

² Sung (1993:192-193) refers to the whole life of Jesus as a 'Lebenssprache' and especially his fellowship with sinners and tax collectors, meals with everyone and healing of the sick as 'Gleichnishandlungen' that imply forgiveness.

³ Wright (1996:280-281) interprets references to the forgiveness of sins within his framework of Israel being in a third exile in their own land while under Roman occupation. The forgiveness of sins longed for by Israel is therefore not primarily a gift to the individual Israelite, but rather another way of saying the 'return from

the historical Jesus and then to examine what sense individual traditions or sayings make therein. The second, taken by scholars such as John Meier (1991) and Dominic Crossan (1991), is to begin with the authentication of the individual components of the tradition and then to attempt to construct the historical Jesus only from elements verified as being authentic.⁵

This article will begin by giving a brief overview of studies that have attempted to identify authentic ᾠφίμυ logia in the Jesus tradition after which a literary form-based approach to studying ᾠφίμυ logia in the synoptic gospels and their implications for understanding how they were transmitted by the early church will be discussed. This approach will then be evaluated in terms of studies of the *chreia* in Mark 2:1-12 (Hägerland 2012) and 3:20-35 (Damm 2013; Mack & Robbins 1989) and the redaction and use of ᾠφίμυ logia in Matthew and Luke.

The Authentication of ᾠφίμυ logia in the Jesus Tradition

It is evident from the table below (adapted from Sung (1993:285))⁶ that while Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, *Gospel of Thomas*, and possibly James, all contain ᾠφίμυ logia linked to Jesus they do not contain a considerable amount thereof. The limited occurrence of ᾠφίμυ logia validates the comment of Vincent Taylor (1941:11) that the extant material in the gospels on Jesus forgiving sin is less than might be expected, as well as the remark of James Dunn (2003, 788) that the sparseness of material within the Jesus tradition forbids any attempt to make much of the theme of Jesus and forgiveness.

| Pericopae | Source | Thomas | Matthew | Mark | Luke | John | James |
|----------------------------------------------|--------|--------|-----------|---------------|------------------|------|---------|
| Prehistory of Jesus – Zechariah’s prediction | L | | | | 1:77 | | |
| John the Baptist | Mark | | | 1:4 | 3:3 | | |
| Healing of the paralytic | Mark | | 9:2, 5, 6 | 2:5, 7, 9, 10 | 5:20, 21, 23, 24 | | [5:15?] |
| Sin against the Holy Spirit | Mark | 44? | 12:31, 32 | 3:28, 29 | 12:10 | | |
| The reason for telling parables | Mark | | | 4:12 | | | |

exile’ for the whole nation. This ‘return’ from the third exile would signal that Israel’s sins had been forgiven and that the covenant has been renewed. For Wright there is no real tension between the personal and the corporate forgiveness of sins. When Jesus announces to the paralysed man that his sins have been forgiven it means that the coming kingdom of YHWH (the eschatological work of the Spirit of YHWH) has embraced him and that the paralysed man was thus experiencing his own personal ‘return from exile’.

⁴ Allison (2009:62-63) includes the unlimited forgiveness of others (Matt. 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4) amongst the sayings of Jesus that depict him as making uncommonly difficult demands to some of his followers.

⁵ The two approaches characterise the so-called Third and Renewed Quest respectively.

⁶ Parallels from the Letter of James and the Gospels of Thomas and John have been added.

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|--|---------------|------------|--------------|-------|--|
| Reason for forgiveness | Mark | | 6:14, 15 | 11:25 (26) | | | |
| Petition in prayer | Q | | 6:12 | | 11:4 | | |
| Forgiving a brother | Q | | 18:21 | | 17:3, 4 | | |
| Parable of the unrepentant slave | M | | 18:27, 32, 35 | | | | |
| Jesus' forgiveness of the woman who anointed him | L | | | | 7:47, 48, 49 | | |
| Jesus' words at the last supper | M | | 26:28 | | | | |
| Jesus' words on the cross | L | | | | 23:34 | | |
| Jesus' final commission | L | | | | 24:47 | | |
| Jesus' appearance to the disciples | J | | | | | 20:23 | |

Scholarship is divided on whether this scant material can be attributed to the historical Jesus. Some of the primary criteria that have been used by scholars to authenticate individual components of the Jesus tradition have been that of coherence, multiple attestation,⁷ embarrassment and discontinuity (Meier 2011:310-322; Perrin 1967:39-49; Porter 2011:695-714). The application of these criteria has resulted in mixed results when applied to the ἀφίημι logia in the Jesus tradition. The results are:

- (a) While there has been some support for the claim that according to the criterion of embarrassment (i.e. actions or sayings of Jesus that would have embarrassed the early church (Meier 2011:310)) that the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Mark 1:4-11) can be considered to be authentic since it would have been problematic for the church to explain why Jesus had undergone a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Backhaus 2011:1761; Meier 1991:168-171), there has been no consensus on the authenticity of the other ἀφίημι logia based on this criterion. This is a general problem with the criterion of embarrassment since there are few clear-cut examples thereof and it would thus be very difficult to get a full picture of the historical Jesus based on it alone (Meier 2011:313). It should also be kept in mind that Mark 1:4 is strictly speaking a John the Baptist logia and not one attributed to the historical Jesus.

⁷ Multiple attestation is normally used in conjunction with the criteria of early attestation since it can indicate an earlier, common source. It also has to be used with other criteria since it can only indicate that the possible common source is an earlier one, and not that it is necessarily the earliest or authentic source (Porter 2011:712-713).

- (b) In evaluating the material according to the criterion of discontinuity (i.e. words and deeds that cannot be derived either from Judaism at the time of Jesus, nor from the early church after him (Meier 2011:314-315)) the problem arises that it presupposes what we do not possess – a full knowledge of Judaism⁸ at the time of Jesus and of primitive Christianity right after him.⁹ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the application of this criterion has not resulted in any consensus on material that can be attributed to the historical Jesus as the survey by Hägerland (2012:3-8) of various scholars' judgement on the authenticity of Mark 2:1-12 illustrates.¹⁰ It is apparent from his survey that especially our limited understanding of second temple Judaism and primitive Christianity has resulted in contrasting views on the authenticity of the ἀφίημι logia in the Jesus tradition.
- (c) If the criterion of multiple attestation – sayings or deeds of Jesus that are attested in more than one independent literary source (e.g. Mark, Q, L, M) and/or in more than one literary form or genre (e.g. parable, controversy story, miracle story etc.) that expresses a common motif¹¹ – is applied to the extant ἀφίημι logia of Jesus the following becomes apparent:
- (i) There is a single occurrence in the triple tradition (Mark 2:5, 7, 9, 10 // Matt. 9:2, 5-6 // Luke 5:20-21, 23-24) of which Mark is the source.
 - (ii) Two other references in Mark to ἀφίημι are taken over by Matthew, but not Luke (Mark 3:28-30 // Matthew 12:31; Mark 11:25-26 // Matt. 6:14-15).
 - (iii) There are logia from Q that both Matthew and Luke use in different literary contexts (cf. Matt. 6:12 // Luke 11:4 and Matt. 12:32 // Luke 12:10).

⁸ It is debateable, for example, whether priests (including the high priest) of the second temple ever pronounced sins to be forgiven (Hägerland 2012:133-142).

⁹ Theissen and Winter have revised the criteria for authenticity to formulate the criterion of historical plausibility which consists of two sub-criteria: contextual plausibility and plausibility of effects. Contextual plausibility consists of Contextual Appropriateness (does it have an element corresponding to Jesus' first-century Jewish context) and Contextual Distinctiveness (does it have features that are distinctive of Jesus within the historical context). The problem is, however, that these criteria are too malleable to be of much use. The synoptic gospels contain very little material about Jesus that cannot be made to correspond to the little we know about first-century Galilean Judaism (Allison 2004:88). While some degree of difference between Jesus and primitive Christianity is needed by historical Jesus research since it would otherwise be impossible to distinguish between the Jesus that was proclaimed and the historical Jesus (Hägerland 2012:19) there is a danger inherent in the criteria of dissimilarity in that it can be used to set Jesus over and against Judaism (Theissen & Winter 2002:167-171, 180).

¹⁰ The negative evaluation of Bultmann of Mark 2:1-12 was based on his assertion that Mark 2:5b-10 was inserted to legitimize the authority of the later followers of Jesus, while Baur and Wrede similarly argued that it was created for a theological reason (primitive Christianity believed Jesus had the authority to forgive sins). In contrast, Fiedler has stated that the claim to be able to forgive sins would have been incomprehensible in early Judaism (since only God was believed to be able to forgive sins), but that this does not affirm its authenticity since it would not have been considered plausible by the latter. It also contradicts Jesus' denial of a link between illness and sin in John 9:2 and Luke 13:1-15, and therefore does not meet the criterion of coherence. Hampel, however, considers it to be authentic for precisely the same reason. Since primitive Christianity, according to him, did not connect forgiveness and healing it would not have been created by them. It is also not clear for Hampel in which Sitz im Leben the Church would need to have their authority legitimised to forgive sins since they believed that they had all already been forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹¹ The occurrence of a given motif in more than one literary source expressed by different literary forms adds considerable weight to the possibility of its being authentic (Meier 2011:318-319). It should, however, be kept in mind that the fact that a saying occurs only once in a single source is no proof that it was not spoken by Jesus (Meier 2011:320).

- (iv) Both Matthew (Matt. 18:27, 32, 35) and Luke (Lk 7:47-49; 17:3; 23:34) have unique ἀφῆμῃ logia.

While it is important to keep Perrin's focus on multiple attested motifs rather than individual sayings in mind (Kloppenborg 2011:272) the logic underlying the four source hypothesis¹² results in almost no material meeting the criterion of multiple attestation due to the lack of other corroborating independent sources for them. It is for this reason that logion 44 ("Jesus said: Whoever blasphemes the Father, he will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes the Son, he will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit, he will not be forgiven either on earth or in heaven") (Gathercole 2014:388), the only reference to forgiveness in *Gospel of Thomas*, is significant since it could constitute an independent source for Mark 3:28-29. This, however, seems unlikely since in contrast to the synoptic parallels (Mark 3:28-29; Matt. 12:31-32; Luke 12:10) *Gospel of Thomas* formulates the logia about blasphemy in a 'Trinitarian', or rather triadic manner, by referring to blasphemy against the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Gathercole 2014:388-390). According to Hägerland (2012:65-66), this Trinitarian structure, and other redactional changes in this Logion¹³ and others,¹⁴ indicate that it is a later theological development of the 'Son of Man' sayings in Q that was taken over by Matthew. Logion 44, therefore, does not represent an independent tradition (Hägerland 2012:66).

Another possible candidate for independent ἀφῆμῃ logia is James 5:15¹⁵ for Mark 2:5-10. Luke Johnson (2005:55) has suggested that James 5:13-18 is the only possible exception to the rule that James does not allude to any narrative gospel material. The reason is that James 5:15 and Mark 2:1-12 combine the theme of forgiveness with Jesus' ability to 'raise up' those who are ill. James 5:15 could thus be an echo of the gospel healing accounts such as the one in Mark 2:1-12. After considering the relationship between the two texts Hägerland (2012:50-51) concludes that it is just remotely possible that James does allude to this more primitive form of the episode in Mark. If this is indeed the case, an argument could be made that it represents an independent source for the logion. The evidence for this is, however, extremely tenuous since Jas 5:15 does not explicitly refer to the ministry of the historical Jesus, but rather to the work of the exalted Lord within the faith community.

It can thus be concluded that there are no multiple attested ἀφῆμῃ logia in the extant Jesus tradition, a single example of one meeting the criteria of embarrassment (Mark 1:4-11) and no consensus on material meeting the criteria of discontinuity. In support of this conclusion it is noteworthy that the Jesus Seminar has, for instance, not marked a single ἀφῆμῃ logia as red (likely authentic), but has rather marked the logia in Matthew 6:12, 18:23-34 and Luke 6:37c as pink (something Jesus probably said) and Mark 11:25,

¹² Q is defined as the material common to Matthew and Luke and not in Mark, L or M. M and L must thus differ from each other (otherwise it becomes Q) and Mark (it is impossible to determine whether parts of Mark were also part of M, Q and L respectively).

¹³ In keeping with its non-eschatological tendency, Thomas has substituted 'earth' and 'heaven' for Matthew's 'in this age' and 'in the [age] to come' (Hägerland 2012:65). Thomas has thus changed the eschatological element by changing the bifurcation of the ages into an earth/heaven duality (Gathercole 2014:391).

¹⁴ It must be noted that most of the instances Meier (1991:135) cites as examples of Thomas' knowledge of Matthean redactional features involve Matthean special material, and it is therefore impossible to know whether Matthew indeed made these redactions himself (Kloppenborg 2011:254).

¹⁵ "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven" – Jas, 5:15.

Matthew 6:14-15 and Luke 11:4 as grey (somewhat unlikely to have been said by Jesus) (Funk & Hoover 1993:549-553). If the criterion of multiple attestation is, however, applied to the occurrence of the motif of forgiveness in different genres and strands of the Synoptic tradition, the evidence is more promising since it occurs in prayers (Mark 11:25; Matt. 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:2-4), controversy stories (Mark 2:1-12; Matt. 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26), parables (Matt. 18:23-35) and a community rule (Matt. 18:15-20, 21-22), as well as in all four strands (Mark, Q, M, and L) of the Synoptic tradition (McArthur 1971:319). It is thus plausible that some of the ἀφίημι logia could go back to the historical Jesus in terms of Dale Allison's (2010:20) modification of the criterion of multiple attestation as the criterion of recurrent attestation. Recurrent attestation means a topic or motif occurs repeatedly throughout the tradition. It is clear that the ἀφίημι logia meet this criterion as is apparent from the following summaries of the different source material in the Jesus tradition in which it occurs (Sung 1993:193-197).

- **The Markan material** – Mark 2:5, 7, 9, 10 (Matt. 9:2, 5-6 // Luke 5:20-21, 23-24); 3:28-30 (Matt. 12:31); 4:12; 11:25-26 (Matt. 6:14-15)
- **The Q-material** – Lk. 11:4 (Matt. 6:12); 12:10 (Matt. 12:32); 17:4 (Matt. 18:21)
- **The L-material** – Lk. 7:47-49; 17:3; 23:34
- **The M-material** – Matt. 18:27, 32, 35

Multiple attested (or recurring) motifs¹⁶ imply that not all sayings in which they occur are the creation of the different evangelists and that they were commonly enough associated with Jesus to become part of several streams of tradition.¹⁷ We thus have to take the construals of these sayings and stories, and their consensus seriously, when such consensus exists (Kloppenborg 2011:273, 275). While it is impossible to determine whether a specific saying goes back to the historical Jesus since a recurring motif does not prove every occurrence thereof is authentic, it appears that the motif of forgiveness did form part of the teaching of the historical Jesus. The criteria commonly used to authenticate individual ἀφίημι logia in the Jesus tradition have, however, not resulted in consensus on any of the particular sayings attributed to the historical Jesus. One reason for this state of affairs is that the ἀφίημι logia in the Jesus tradition have been appropriated selectively (there is a single triple tradition example) and have been redacted in different ways by the various synoptic gospels. The question thus arises whether there is not another way with which to approach the ἀφίημι logia in the Jesus tradition in order to clarify their relationship with each other and the historical Jesus.

Literary Form, Memory and the Historical Jesus

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the utilisation of memory studies in the study of the historical Jesus in order to assess the trustworthiness of the transmitted

¹⁶ The difference between the criteria of coherence and multiple attested motifs is that the latter refers to the same motif occurring in different sayings in various documents or forms, attesting to its broad association with the Jesus tradition, while coherence refers to motifs which cohere with material assessed to be authentic through the use of other criteria. There can thus be an overlap between the two criteria.

¹⁷ The problem remains that they could also be typical of material that was commonly associated with any religious leader in second temple Judaism and that it thus cannot be assumed to have been a distinctive teaching of the historical Jesus, since various other Jewish religious leaders (e.g. John the Baptist and Paul) also proclaimed the forgiveness of sins.

tradition (Crook 2014:1). A number of scholars (Byrskog 2007; Hägerland 2012; McIver 2011) have specifically investigated the relationship between the literary form in which the Jesus logia have been transmitted and memory. Samuel Byrskog (2007:212), for example, has called on scholars to “focus on the formation of narrative entities in recurrent mnemonic situations of transmission and performance and [to] look for stylised patterns in the Gospels that are specifically mnemonic and narrative in character” and have suggested *chreia* (together with *apomnemoneuma*) as a starting-point¹⁸ since they were considered to be easy to remember due to their briefness and being attributed to a specific character.

Robert McIver (2011:131) has argued, however, that when the different literary types containing material attributed to the historical Jesus are taken into consideration a case can rather be made that material such as aphorisms¹⁹ and parables have the greatest chance of belonging to material that originated with Jesus teaching his disciples. The reason is that according to memory studies, aphorisms²⁰ are, usually remembered with near verbatim accuracy or not at all. In support of his claim McIver (2011:177) has shown that in contrast to parables, that usually show only a loose relationship, there is frequently a verbatim relationship between the versions of aphorisms in two or more Gospels. Aphorisms thus lend themselves to the accurate transmission of material in an oral context.²¹ This does not mean, however, that they do not need to be rehearsed constantly if they are to be remembered in long-term memory (McIver 2011:167, 180). The fact that parables need to be transmitted relatively coherently to remain intelligible and are generally told with great economy also gives them relative stability in an oral setting. It could thus be argued that the core of the parables (their gist) would have been transmitted reliably (McIver 2011:174-175).

Stories about Jesus in the form of *chreia*²² stem from the memory of those around Jesus; it is unlikely that a Galilean Jew would have instructed his followers by using *chreiai* since it is a literary form common in ancient Greek and Latin, and not Jewish, literature.²³ *Chreiai* are, however, the most natural type of material to have developed in the collective memory of Jesus’ earliest followers who had been influenced by the conventions of the

¹⁸ This call has been heeded by his PhD student Tobias Hägerland in his 2009 dissertation published as *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins*. The focus of Hägerland (2012:1-2) is specifically on the ἀφῆμῃ logia that depict Jesus as someone who explicitly claimed to have the authority to forgive sins.

¹⁹ According to Riesner (1988:392-393) 42% of the 247 independent units that contain a saying of Jesus in the Synoptics are one verse long while a further 23% are two verses long and can thus be described as being in an aphoristic-like form.

²⁰ A short, pithy saying that conveys personal insight (in contrast to a proverb that conveys collective wisdom) with a very basic internal structure that often utilises vivid imagery.

²¹ In support of the stability of orally transmitted aphorisms and proverbs McIver (2011:177-178) refers to the work of Alan Dundes (1999:9-10) on the preservation of the proverb, “Do not be too sweet lest you be swallowed; do not be too bitter lest you be spat out” over more than a millennium without the help of written sources.

²² In his *Progymnasmata*, Aelius Theon (201.17-19) defines a *chreia* as “a concise statement or action which is attributed with aptness to some specified character or to something analogous to a character” (Hock & O’Neil 1986:82-83). The last aspect is central to what a *chreia* is (Byrskog 2007:212-213). If a *chreia* is expanded according to the pattern described by the *Progymnasmata* it turns into an *apomnemoneuma*. *Chreiai* and *apomnemoneuma* are similar, but not identical, for while the latter was also seen as being useful for living it was longer than *chreia* and was not attributed to anyone specific. While a narrative could explain something by a generalised narrative presentation the saying or action of a *chreia* had to be attributed to a specified character (Byrskog 2007:212-213).

²³ An argument can rather be made that the historical Jesus preferred to tell parables.

Greco-Roman world (McIver 2011:131).²⁴ The reason for this is that *chreia* intentionally combined features of narrativity, oral performance and memory (Byrskog 2007:211). They were thus, as their name suggests, useful for remembering the words and deeds of specific persons. If the Jesus tradition was transmitted as *chreia* it is possible that not only his words would have been preserved, but also their setting and effect on the first hearers thereof, since a *chreia*, unlike a maxim, often included a reference to the setting in which it was uttered as well as to the response of its hearers.

According to Neyrey (1998:671) Mark contains a number of responsive *chreiai* (e.g. Mark 2:1-12, 15-17, 18-22, 23-28; 3:1-6, 22-30, 31-35; 4:35-41; 6:1-6; 7:1-13; 8:11-13; 9:9-13; 10:2-9, 13-16, 17-22, 35-41; 11:27-33; 12:13-17, 18-27, 28-34, 35-37); in her study of Mark 8:27-10:45 Marion Moeser (2002) identified nine Markan anecdotes that can be considered to be types of *chreia* leading her to claim that the majority of Markan anecdotes are modelled upon the Greek *chreia*. Some scholars (Butts 1986; Mack & Robbins 1989) have also noted that *chreiai* are not only common in the Synoptic Gospels in general and Mark specifically, but are also used specifically to convey the theme of forgiveness. With regard to the motive of forgiveness Buchanan (1982:504) writes that: "When all these *chreias* are put together and then organized according to subject matter, they fall into four natural categories: 1) those picturing Jesus recruiting and training apostles, 2) those showing Jesus in conflict with the Pharisees in defence of the tax collectors and sinners, 3) those picturing Jesus as he led an underground movement under the noses of the Romans, and 4) those teaching forgiveness and reconciliation."

There is thus support from a number of scholars for studying some of the Markan ἀφίμνι logia from the perspective that they were composed as *chreiai*. While it cannot be proved that the gospel tradition was consciously expanded in accordance with the patterns described in the rhetorics handbooks, Byrskog's hypothesis appears to be plausible since, according to Eusebius, it was claimed by Papias that the Jesus tradition was transmitted in the form of *chreia* (McIver 2011:134). Papias, in his statement that the Gospel according to Mark derives from Peter's interpreter states that: "Peter... used to give his teachings in the form of *chreiai* (πρὸς τὰς χρείας ἐποίετο τὰς διδασκαλίας) but had no intention of providing an ordered arrangement of the logia of the Lord (Hist. Eccl. 3.39.15)." According to Bauckham (2006:203, 214-217), the reference to *chreiai* should here be understood in the technical sense it was used by ancient rhetoricians. If he is correct, the classification of the Jesus tradition as *chreiai* is very old and Papias could be stating that Peter taught the Jesus tradition through them and that Mark was their interpreter (Byrskog 2011:1492; Riesner 2011:429).²⁵ According to Byrskog (2007:213-215) Mark's role as ἐρμηνευτής should probably be understood in the light of the *chreia* exercises described in the *Progymnasmata*.²⁶ The first of these was the memorisation of *chreia* (ἀπαγγελία) and the recital thereof in the same or different words from memory. The requirement of this

²⁴ A full study of the Gospels will, according to Byrskog, reveal the extent to which they are made up with *chreia*-like building-blocks and how these blocks relate to the rest of their narratives (Byrskog 2007:223).

²⁵ While the trustworthiness of the Papias tradition, referred to by Eusebius, can be questioned due to its apologetic nature, the important point is that Papias (or at least Eusebius) envisions the use of *chreia* in the transmission of the Jesus tradition. The use of *chreia* was thus a plausible way of transmitting the teachings of Jesus for some ancient writers who attempted to give an account of how it had occurred.

²⁶ The *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon of Alexandria and the New Testament Gospels were most likely written during the same period (Robbins 2006:125).

exercise was clarity, not verbatim repetition. The students performing it in a rhetorical culture²⁷ were thus not ‘copying’ their ‘source’, but rather composing the tradition anew (Robbins 1993:120).

The new emphasis on the role of *chreiai* in the Jesus tradition and the composition of the Synoptic gospels raises the question whether the exercises described in various ancient handbooks can be used to reconstruct the form in which the Jesus’ ἀφίημι logia were transmitted. While it would not be possible to reconstruct the *verba* of Jesus, or to establish whether he did indeed utter these logia, it could be possible to reconstruct the earliest transmitted memories, or rather performances, of the early church of the teaching of Jesus on forgiveness, and how they were appropriated by the writers of the Synoptic Gospels.

Forgiveness in Selected Markan ἀφίημι *chreia*

In order to ascertain whether an analysis of the Markan ἀφίημι *chreia* provides a clearer understanding of the transmitted Jesus tradition the approach will be evaluated with regard to two specific pericopae (Mark 2:1-12 and 3:20-25) and the studies thereof by Hägerland (2012), Damm (2013), Mack and Robbins (1989). Their pre-history, Markan elaboration and Matthean redaction will be considered, but not that of Luke since the scope of this article does not allow for it.

Mark 2:1-12

According to Hägerland (2012:231-232), if it is assumed that the oral tradition underlying Mark 2:1-12 conformed to general progymnastic patterns, there are three possibilities for the formation of the pericope. The earliest tradition may, firstly, have circulated in the form of a *chreia* proper, only to be expanded into an *apomnemoneuma* at a secondary oral or literary stage. Secondly, a relatively brief *apomnemoneuma* may have been elaborated further into a longer one by inserting secondary material. Thirdly, it is conceivable that the entire episode (or at least 2:3-12) reproduces the earliest attainable tradition.

After analysing the composition of Mark 2:1-12, Hägerland (2012:234) concludes that Mark 2:3-5 and 11-12 were in their most primitive shape an *apomnemoneuma* introduced by an *exordium* in Mark 2:3-4, which narrated the background events. An *exordium* should, according to Theon (216.10-12), be specific to a particular *chreia* (Hägerland 2012:234) as is the case of the description of the four men carrying the paralysed man and lowering him through the roof to get him to Jesus. It also aligns with the common use of an *exordium* to create tension that compelled the speaker to deliver the *chreia* proper to resolve it.

Hägerland (2012:232) takes Mark 2:5 and 11 (“Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, ‘Child, your sins [being] forgiven, I tell you, rise, take your pallet, and go home!’”) as the *chreia* that was originally transmitted. For him it meets the criteria established in the *Progymnasmata* since it is a concise pronouncement attributed to a historical person and that of Patillion that it be contained within a single syntactic system. Finally, Mark 2:12 forms the brief conclusion of the *apomnemoneuma*. Its structure thus

²⁷ Robbins (1993:118) distinguishes between (a) oral culture that has no written literature in view; (b) rhetorical culture that is aware of written documents, uses written and oral language interactively, and composes both orally and scribally in a rhetorical manner and (c) scribal culture that focuses on ‘copying’ and ‘editing’ either oral statements or written texts.

roughly corresponds to that of an expanded *chreia* as it is explained in the *chreia* chapter of Theon's *Progymnasmata*. Mark has expanded thereon by adding a *narratio* about Jesus' response to the reaction of the scribes (2:6-10) and a *conclusio* providing both the reaction of the paralytic and the crowd (2:12).

When Matthew's version of the *apomnemoneuma* is compared to Mark's it becomes apparent that, while largely keeping Mark's structure (he has only moved the reference to the authority of the Son of Man from the *narratio* (Mark 2:10a) to his *conclusio* (Matt. 9:8b)), Matthew has abbreviated his story in regard to its setting. Matthew has also shortened Mark's *narratio* of the miracle to focus more on the controversy about the forgiveness of sins which he extends explicitly to the praxis of the community (cf. Mark 2:6-10 and Matt. 9:3-6a).²⁸

The application of the known ways in which *chreiai* were constructed and elaborated in an analysis of Mark 2:1-12 supports the claim that it can help in reconstructing the pre-Markan forms of some ἀφίημι *chreia* in Mark. Moreover, when compared to Matthew's version, it is also apparent that the core of the *chreia* in Mark is essentially preserved by Matthew even though he has reworked Mark's version. It is, however, a question if this approach applies to all the ἀφίημι *chreia* in Mark and if the tradition underlying them can also be clearly identified by assuming that Mark had elaborated the *chreia* that he had received. In order to answer these questions Mark 3:20-35, a longer and more complex ἀφίημι *chreia*, will be analysed briefly.

Mark 3:20-35

According to Mack and Robbins (1989:162-163) the Beelzebul controversy in the three synoptic gospels exhibits less verbatim agreement than other stories therein. From the perspective of Theon's *Progymnasmata* they understand the common tradition as consisting of a double *chreia* (i.e. a *chreia* containing the statements of two characters of which either one creates a *chreia*) that is amplified by the three synoptic gospels in different ways (Mack & Robbins 1989:166-167).

Chreia 1 ἔλεγον ὅτι Βεελζεβοῦλ ἔχει καὶ ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια.

Chreia 2 Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτοὺς καὶ ἂν βασιλεία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν μερισθῇ, οὐ δύναται σταθῆναι ἡ βασιλεία ἐκείνη· καὶ ἂν οἰκία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν μερισθῇ, οὐ δυνήσεται ἡ οἰκία ἐκείνη σταθῆναι. καὶ εἰ ὁ σατανᾶς ἀνέστη ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐμερίσθη, οὐ δύναται σθῆναι ἀλλὰ τέλος ἔχει. ἀλλ' οὐ δύναται οὐδεὶς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ εἰσελθὼν τὰ σκεύη αὐτοῦ διαρπάσαι, ἂν μὴ πρῶτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν δῇσῃ, καὶ τότε τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει.

The analysis of Mark 3:20-35 reveals that Mark has extensively expanded and elaborated the two *chreia* that focus on Jesus' proposition, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" (3:23). According to Damm (2013:223-224) Mark 3:20-25 contains three *topoi* arranged in a chiasmus. These *topoi* (that according to Mack and Robbins were already part of the *chreia*

²⁸ While Matthew distinguishes between the scribes (who react negatively) and the crowds (who react positively) in the audience the accusation of the scribes (Matt. 9:3) is similar to the accusation made by the Sanhedrin in Matt. 26:65 in order to express the irreconcilable differences between Jesus and his opponents (Repschinski 2000:75).

in its pre-Markan form) express three charges against Jesus followed by three replies in reverse sequence, by using an argument for their implausibility (3:24-26). The first half of the chiasm (3:20-22) can be understood as a *chreia* expansion that presents the three charges against Jesus. The charges are: he is crazy (3:20-21), possessed by Beelzebul (3:22a) and casts out demons by the power of demons (3:22b). In the second half of the chiasmus Mark's Jesus replies to these charges in reverse order. His proposition (a responsive *chreia* – “how is Satan able to cast out Satan?”) is supported by four logical arguments (three from analogy and one from contradiction). After the response to the first charge Jesus offers a tripartite reply to the second charge (3:28-30) with a countercharge that warns the scribes that their remark will earn them eternal status as sinners (3:29). Finally, Jesus replies (3:31-25) to the first charge with a *chreia* (3:33).

If Matthew's version of the controversy is compared to Mark's it becomes apparent that he has reshaped the controversy story into a specific attack on the Pharisees (Repschinski 2000:141) by using rhetorical questions (Matt. 12:23, 34b) and directly addressing them (Matt. 12:34a) while omitting references to Jesus' family (cf. Mark 3:31-35). He has also added an argument from a common quality (Matt. 12:27), a counter definition (Matt. 12:28) and rationale (Matt. 12:34b) for Jesus' power, as well as an analogy from nature (Matt. 12:33) to Jesus' answer. He has, however, only retained the third charge against Jesus (Matt. 12:24) in order to focus the controversy on the charge that he is able to expel demons through the power of Beelzebul. Matthew also emphasizes the Christological aspect of the controversy by reorientating the controversy as one over the crowds' suggestion of Jesus being the Son of David (Matt. 12:23).

The analysis of Mark 3:20-35 and Matthew 12:22-37 reveals that it is not an easy task to analyse the Jesus tradition underlying the different synoptic gospels. Not only is the task of identifying a common tradition difficult, but it is also apparent that since *chreia* could be elaborated or abridged, it is not always possible to determine the form of the earliest transmitted version of a *chreia*. One should thus be wary of using the *Progymnasmata* as rulebooks with which to reconstruct their original form. There is also a further aspect to consider in studying the relationship between the ἀφίμυ logia in the Jesus tradition and the historical Jesus: the transmission of these *chreia* was not undertaken as an exercise by the evangelist. Their transmission and elaboration were part of an intentional theological interpretive and appropriation process that cannot be explained as a mere rhetorical exercise. It is therefore necessary to examine briefly the manner in which Matthew and Luke appropriated the Markan ἀφίμυ logia.

The Redaction of ἀφίμυ logia in the Jesus Tradition

In comparing the different sources of the synoptic gospels with each other it becomes evident that both Matthew and Luke have redacted both Mark and Q extensively. For example, Matthew has moved Mark's phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν from being an explanation of the baptism of John (Mark 1:4) to the Last Supper, as a statement on the meaning of Jesus' death (Matt. 26:28) (Backhaus 2011:1761). While the Markan phrase thus occurs in Matthew it does not do so in the same narrative context. It is, moreover, not only the reformulation and modification of individual pericopae that reveal Matthew and

Luke's redactional processes. It is also apparent in the manner in which they interweave the motif of forgiveness with other theological themes in their respective Gospels.

The ἀφίημι logia in Matthew

The verb ἀφίημι occurs in four pericopae in the Matthew.

| Text [source] | Related theme |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Matt. 6:9-15 The Lord's Prayer | Matt. 6:9-10 links heaven and earth while 6:12, 14-15 correlates the action of God in heaven with the conduct of believers on earth. |
| Matt. 9:1-8 The healing of the paralysed man | In Matt. 9:6 the healing serves as proof that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins while Matt. 9:8 states that the crowd were amazed that God had given such authority to men. |
| Matt. 12:31-32 Blasphemy against the Spirit | Matt. 12:1-8 relates the controversy over Jesus as the Son of Man who is lord over the Sabbath (i.e. one who has authority over it); 12:22-32 describes the Beelzebul controversy which contains kingdom language, eschatological judgement (12:27) and references to the authority/power of Jesus to forgive sin in the present, linked to the coming age (12:32). Matt. 12:33-37 also refers to judgement. |
| Matt. 18:21-35 The unforgiving slave | Matt. 18:15-20 states that what the church decides on earth the heavenly Father will condone while the following parable (18:23-35) also refers to the judgement of the heavenly Father (18:35) that will reflect the practice of forgiveness by believers on earth. |

It is apparent from the table above that the verb ἀφίημι occurs in pericopae in Matthew in which the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community, especially with regard to its authority and sharing of Jesus' power, plays an important role. Some of this is due to Matthew's redaction, while the rest occurs already in Mark (e.g. Mark 2:10) and possibly in Q (cf. Luke 11:4) and is taken over by Matthew. Matthew thus follows Mark in linking the forgiveness of sins to the motif of power and authority by also utilising his Q and M sources in this regard. The redaction of the ἀφίημι logia also reflects Matthew's understanding of the interconnectedness of the authority and conduct of the church with the eschatological judgement of God.

The ἀφίημι logia in Luke

Luke uses ἀφίημι 15 times in 6 pericopae in regard to Jesus (Sung 1993:194).

| Text | Related Topics |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Luke 1:77 – Zechariah’s prediction about John | The coming salvation through Jesus which encompasses the forgiveness of sins. |
| Luke 5:17-26 – The healing of the paralysed man | Luke 5:17– Pharisees and teachers respond to the action of Jesus. |
| Luke 7:36-50 – Jesus’ forgiveness of the woman who anointed him | Luke 7:36, 39 – Debate with Pharisee leads to the parable about the two debtors. |
| Luke 11:2-4 – The Lord’s Prayer | Luke 11:4 – Petition for the forgiveness of ὀφείλοντι (‘debt’). |
| Luke 12:10 – Blasphemy against the Spirit | Warning against the leaven of the Pharisees (12:1) and the coming persecution (12:2-11). |
| Luke 17:3-4 – Forgiving a brother | Command to forgive a brother. |
| Luke 23:33-34 – Jesus’ words on the cross | Jesus forgives his crucifiers (23:34). |
| Luke 24:47 – Jesus’ final commission | Forgiveness will be proclaimed to all the nations. |

Luke’s redaction of ἀφίημι logia relates to at least two aspects of the ministry and teaching of the Lukan Jesus: the opposition to Jesus by his enemies (especially the Pharisees) and his references to debt.

In Luke the Pharisees are often depicted as being in conflict with Jesus (Schottroff 2006:146). Although Luke’s portrait of the Pharisees is a nuanced one, they are always depicted as enemies of Jesus when they appear in tandem with the experts of the law (5:17, 21, 30; 6:7; 7:30; 11:53; 14:3; 15:2) (Green 1995:70). They disagree fundamentally with Jesus’ keeping the company of sinners and tax collectors (Luke 5:1-11; 5:27-32; 6:11; 7:36-50; 15:2; 19:1-11) and it is therefore not surprising that Luke links their conflict with Jesus with the theme of forgiveness of sin (5:17-26; 7:36-50 and 12:10).

Two other pericopae in which the Lukan Jesus refers to forgiveness contain references to debt. In the first, while eating at the house of a Pharisee named Simon (Luke 7:36-50), Jesus tells a parable about two debtors in order to explain why he forgave the sinful woman present at the meal (Luke 7:40-43). According to Jesus, the woman who had been forgiven many sins, had responded with an outlandish display of affection due to her recognition of the size of her debt that had been forgiven. It is the view of Chilton (2011:2833-2834) that this use of debt in a metaphorical manner can be traced to the historical Jesus²⁹ who had adapted the idiom of ‘debt’ in order to develop a systematic aspect of his message (cf. Matt.

²⁹ The gospels attribute a coherent language of debt to Jesus that they apply to the theme of forgiveness. Both Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4 link sin to debt, while several parables utilise the metaphorical and literal senses of ‘debt’ in line with the Targum of Isa 50:1 where debt refers to both money owed to others and sins before God (Chilton 2011:2821). The parable of the dishonest steward (Luke 16:1-9), however, describes a dishonest steward releasing the debtors of his master from their debt in order to gain their favour. In this case a metaphorical meaning for debt is not apparent.

6:19-21; 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33, 34; 18:22). In the second pericope (Luke 11:1-4) Jesus instructs his disciples to petition God for the forgiveness of their debt (ὀφείλοντι is here used metaphorically).

It is clear from the afore-mentioned that Matthew and Luke were redacting their ὀφίμια logia to address the specific concerns of their respective communities. The question thus arises whether their source material (Q and Mark) did not do the same with their sources? Why would their authors treat the Jesus logia differently than Matthew and Luke did? And if they did redact their material, is it at all possible to reconstruct its prehistory if this process was not just rhetorically, but also theologically motivated?

Conclusion

The analysis of the extant Jesus tradition has shown it is more than plausible that the historical Jesus instructed his followers about the necessity of the forgiveness of sins. The criterion of multiple, or rather recurring, attestation testifies to the motif (but not the individual logia) being present in all the synoptic source material in a variety of literary types. The depiction of Jesus forgiving sin also agrees with the depiction of him eating with sinners and being in conflict with Jewish agents of forgiveness (the Priests), and thus meets the criterion of coherence. It is unclear, however, which of the individual ὀφίμια logia go back to the historical Jesus and if they do, what their earliest form was since Matthew, Luke and Thomas have all redacted the forgiveness logia with material that reflected their theological concerns. It can thus be expected that Mark and Q did the same.

Studies on *chreia* elaboration show some promise in understanding how the Jesus ὀφίμια logia were transmitted (without claiming that Jesus actually formulated these *chreia*). The contention of Butts (1986:138) that the *chreia* form was characteristic of the pre-Gospel stage of the tradition in which collections of sayings and stories about Jesus were being transmitted orally from person to person and from community to community therefore need to be taken seriously. The concise nature of *chreia* also make them an ideal unit to retain in memory.³⁰ While it is reasonable to assume that the elaboration of the *chreia* was not a free, uncontrolled, process and that the rules taught in texts such as the *Progymnasmata* would have played some role in determining how material could be modified, it should, however, be kept in mind that this was not a mechanical process. McIver (2011:135, 141), in his analysis of *chreia*, has argued in this regard that while they closely preserve the sayings of Jesus, at the same time they allow flexibility in the language used to retell them.

Moreover, the choice of *chreiai* as literary form is an important one for understanding the stability of the Jesus tradition and the intention of those transmitting it. Mason (2011:1680) states that an axiom of rhetorical training was that a story should never be told twice in the same way in order to avoid boring audiences. The standard preparatory exercise in rhetoric was therefore to rework *chreiai*. In the words of Robbins (1993:120-121) “culture-transmitting traditions invite, in fact require, continual reformulation, just like speaking does”. In the rhetorical culture of the first century Mediterranean world speech was influenced by writing and writing by speech. In a scribal culture scribes were expected to move their eyes back and forth from manuscript to manuscript that they were copying

³⁰ Unlike aphorisms (Crossan 1983) the context of the saying could also have been transmitted accurately.

word for word, intentionally modifying wording only for editorial purposes; or to write down what they hear as another person read from a manuscript or performed a speech (Robbins 1993:116). In a rhetorical culture *chreiai* were, however, not copied, but creatively performed. Their aim was not primarily to preserve a saying unchanged, but intentionally to use it creatively in a new context and performance. From the analysis from Mark 2:1-12 and 3:20-35 it is evident that the process of transmission and adaptation of the Jesus tradition led to the addition of new material to the logia of Jesus. It is, however, no easy task to determine how the material might have been reworked (e.g. *chreiai* could be elaborated or abbreviated). When considering the use of the Markan ἀφίημι logia by Matthew and Luke it is apparent that they were also used theologically in a creative way and not only rhetorically edited.

In considering the relationship between Jesus and the forgiveness of sins the question is thus not only whether Jesus was remembered correctly (i.e. the authenticity of the Jesus ἀφίημι logia) but also how the tradition was utilised rhetorically and theologically in a creative manner. What is apparent in the textual phase of the tradition can also be expected from the less stable oral phase.³¹ The possible transmission of the Jesus ἀφίημι logia as *chreia* indicates that they were never transmitted as ‘cold memory’ or as a ‘frozen tradition’.³² Stated differently, they were not formulated as a fixed legal code. Preserved as *chreia* their memorisation and transmission process was an invitation to reimagine innovatively the logia of Jesus. *Chreia* were to be performed anew and not only to be repeated verbatim. The ἀφίημι *chreia* were thus not frozen artefacts transmitted in a carefully regulated cold chain, to use a modern metaphor. They were rather incendiaries that ignited the theological imagination of the early church in a context in which the reflection on the practice and nature of forgiveness was deemed critically important – and useful – in all the extant Jesus-traditions.

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³¹ John Kloppenborg (2012, 132) has shown that despite the stability of the wording of the measure-for-measure aphorism the fact that it functions in five quite distinct performative contexts (Q 6.37; Luke 6:37-38; Mark 4:24-25; Matt. 7:1-2; 1 Clem. 13:2) it is misleading to insist that it remains intact. Aphorisms are thus also not used or transmitted in an unchanged manner. We also have no way of knowing if an aphorism was falsely attributed to Jesus.

³² Kelber (2005:232) describes the memory process by which the disciples, according to Birger Gerhardsson, committed the teachings of Jesus to memory and then transmitted these teachings by continuous repetition as ‘cold memory’. In contrast Kelber (2005:236-237) argues that memory is not a mechanism for the preservation of the verbatim teachings of Jesus, but rather one that is almost certain to introduce significant change into what is recorded (McIver 2011:8).

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